

A LETTER from a Clergy - man in the City,  
 To his Friend in the Country,  
 Containing his REASONS  
 For not Reading the DECLARATION.

S I R,

**I** Do not wonder at your concern for finding an Order of Council published in the *Gazette* for Reading the King's Declaration for Liberty of Conscience in all Churches and Chappels in this Kingdom. You desire to know my Thoughts about it, and I shall freely tell them ; for this is not a time to be reserved.

Our Enemies who have given our Gracious King this Counsel against us, have taken the most effectual way not only to ruine us, but to make us appear the Instruments of our own Ruine, that what course soever we take, we shall be undone ; and one side or other will conclude that we have undone our selves, and fall like Fools.

To lose our Livings and Preferments, nay our Liberties and Lives in a plain and direct opposition to Popery, as suppose for refusing to read Mass in our Churches, or to swear to the *Trent*-Creed, is an honourable way of falling, and has the divine comforts of suffering for Christ and his Religion ; and I hope there is none of us but can chearfully submit to the will of God in it. But this is not our present Case ; to read the Declaration, is not to read the Mass, nor to profess the *Romish* Faith ; and therefore some will judge that there is no hurt in reading it, and that to suffer for such a Refusal, is not to fall like Confessors, but to suffer as Criminals for disobeying the lawful Commands of our Prince : but yet we judge, and we have the concurring Opinions of all the Nobility and Gentry with us, who have already suffered in this Cause, that to take away the Test and Penal Laws at this time, is but one step from the introducing of Popery ; and therefore to read such a Declaration in our Churches, though it do not immediately bring Popery in, yet it sets open our Church doors for it, and then it will take its own time to enter : So that should we comply with this Order, all good Protestants would despise and hate us, and then we may be easily crushed, and shall soon fall with great dishonour, and without any pity. This is the difficulty of our Case ; we shall be

centured on both sides, but with this difference : We shall fall a little sooner by not reading the Declaration, if our Gracious Princee relent this as an act of an obstinate and pevilsh or factious Disobedience, as our Enemies will be sure to represent it to him; We shall as certainly fall, and not long after, if we do read it, and then we shall fall unpierced and despised, and it may be with the Cuttes of the Nation, whom we have ruined by our Compliance; and this is the way never to rise more : And may I suffer all that can be suffered in this World, rather than contribute to the final Ruine of the best Church in the World.

Let us then examine this matter impartially, as those who have no mind either to ruine themselves, or to ruine the Church : I suppose no Minister of the Church of *England* can give his consent to the Declaration. Let us then consider whether reading the Declaration in our Churches be not an interpretative Consent, and will not with great reason be interpreted to be so : For,

*First*, By our Law all Ministerial Officers are accountable for their Actions: The Authority of Superiours, though of the King himself, cannot justifie inferiour Officers, much less the Ministers of State, if they should execute any illegal Commands; which shews, that our Law does not look upon the Ministers of Church or State to be mere Machines and Tools to be managed wholly by the Will of Superiours, without exercising any Act of Judgment or Reason themselves; for then inferiour Ministers were no more punishable than the Horses are which draw an innocent man to *Tyburn*: and if inferiour Ministers are punishable, then our Laws suppose that what we do in obedience to Superiours, we make our own Act by doing it, and I suppose that signifies our Consent, in the eye of the Law, to what we do. It is a Maxime in our Law, *That the King can do no wrong*; and therefore if any wrong be done, the Crime and Guilt is the Ministers who does it: for the Laws are the King's publick Will, and therefore he is never supposed to command any thing contrary to Law; nor is any Minister, who does an illegal Action, allowed to pretend the King's Command and Authority for it: and yet this is the only Reason I know, why we must not obey a Prince against the Laws of the Land, or the Laws of God, because what we do, let the Authority be what it will that commands it, becomes our own Act, and we are responsible for it; and then as I observed before, it must imply our own Consent.

*Secondly*, The Ministers of Religion have a greater tie and Obligation than this, because they have the care and conduct of mens Souls, and therefore are bound to take care that what they publish in their Churches,

Churches, be neither contrary to the Laws of the Land, nor to the good of the Church : For the Ministers of Religion are not lookt upon as common Cryers, but what they Read, they are supposed to recommend too, tho' they do no more than Read it ; and therefore to read any thing in the Church, which I do not consent to and approve, nay which I think prejudicial to Religion, and the Church of God, as well as contrary to the Laws of the Land, is to Misguide my People, and to Dissemble with God and Men ; because it is presum'd, that I neither do, nor ought to read any thing in the Church, which I do not in some degree approve. Indeed, let mens private opinions be what they will, in the nature of the thing, he that Reads such a Declaration to his People, teaches them by it : For is not Reading Teaching ? Suppose then I do not consent to what I read, yet I consent to teach my People what I read : and herein is the evil of it ; for it may be it were no fault to consent to the Declaration, but if I consent to teach my People what I do not consent to, myself, I am sure that is a great one : And he who can distinguish between consenting to read the Declaration, and consenting to teach the People by the Declaration, when reading the Declaration is teaching it, has a very subtle distinguishing-Conscience. Now if consenting to read the Declaration be a consent to teach it my People, then the natural Interpretation of Reading the Declaration, is, That he who Reads it, in such a solemn teaching-manner, Approves it. If this be not so, I desire to know, why I may not read an Homily for Transubstantiation, or Invocation of Saints, or the Worship of Images, if the King sends me such good Catholic Homilies, and commands me to read them ? And thus we may instruct our People in all the points of Popery, and recommend it to them with all the Sophistry and artificial Insinuations, in obedience to the King, with a very good Conscience, because without our consent : If it be said, this would be a contradiction to the Doctrine of our Church by Law established ; so I take the Declaration to be : And if we may read the Declaration contrary to Law, because it does not imply our consent to it ; so we may Popish Homilies, for the bare reading them will not imply our consent, no more than the reading the Declaration does : But whether I consent to the Doctrine or no, it is certain I consent to teach my People this Doctrine ; and it is to be considered, whether an honest man can do this.

*Thirdly,* I suppose no man will doubt, but the King intends, that our Reading the Declaration should signify to the Nation, our Consent and Approbation of it ; for the Declaration does not want Publishing, for it is sufficiently known already : but our Reading it in our Churches

must serve instead of Addresses of Thanks, which the Clergy generally refused, though it was only to Thank the King for His Gracious Promises renewed to the Church of *England*, in his Declaration, which was much more innocent, than to publish the Declaration itself in our Churches: This would persuade one, that the King thinks our reading the Declaration, to signify our Consent, and that the People will think it to be so. And he that can satisfy his Conscience, to do an action without consent; which the nature of the Thing, the Design, and intention of the Command, and the Sense of the People expound to be a Consent, may, I think, as well satisfy himself with Equivocations and mental Reservations.

There are two things to be answered to this, which must be considered.

I. That the People understand our Minds, and see that this is matter of Force upon us, and meer Obedience to the King. To which I answer,

1. Possibly the People do understand that the matter of the Declaration is against our Principles: But is this any excuse, that we read that, and by reading recommend that to them, which is against our own Consciences and Judgments? Reading the Declaration would be no Fault at all, but our Duty, when the King commands it, did we approve of the matter of it; but to consent to teach our People such Doctrines as we think contrary to the Laws of God, or the Laws of the Land, does not lessen but aggravate the Fault, and People must be very good natured to think this an Excuse.

2. It is not likely that all the people will be of a mind in this matter, some may excuse it, others, and those it may be the most, the best, and the wisest men, will condemn us for it, and then how shall we justify ourselves against their Censures? when the world will be divided in their Opinions, the plain way is certainly the best, to do what we can justify our selves, and then let men judge as they please. No men in *England* will be pleased with our Reading the Declaration, but those who hope to make great advantage of it against us, and against our Church and Religion: others will severely condemn us for it, and censure us as false to our Religion, and as Betrayers both of Church and State: and besides that, it does not become a Minister of Religion, to do any thing, which in the opinion of the most charitable men can only be excused; for what needs an excuse, is either a fault or looks very like one; besides this I say, I will not trust mens Charity; those who have suffered themselves in this Cause, will not excuse us for fear of suffering; those who are inclined to excuse us now, will not do so when they

they consider the thing better, and come to feel the ill consequences of it : when our Enemies open their eyes, and tell them what our Reading the Declaration signified, which they will then tell us we ought to have seen before, though they were not bound to see it ; for we are to guide and instruct them, not they us.

II. Others therefore think, that when we read the Declaration, we should publickly profess, that it is not our own judgment, but that we only read it in obedience to the King ; and then our reading it cannot imply our consent to it : Now this is only *Protestatio contra factum*, which all people will laugh at, and scorn us for : for such a solemn reading it in the time of Divine Service, when all men ought to be most grave and serious, and far from dissembling with God or Men, does in the nature of the thing imply our approbation ; and should we declare the contrary, when we read it, what shall we say to those who ask us, Why then do you read it ? But let those who have a mind try this way, which, for my part, I take to be a greater and more unjustifiable provocation of the King, than not to read it ; and, I suppose, those who do not read it, will be thought plainer and honest men, and will escape as well as those who read it and protest against it : and yet nothing less than an express Protestation against it will save this matter ; for only to say, they read it merely in obedience to the King, does not express their dissent : it signifies indeed, that they would not have read it, if the King had not commanded it ; but these words do not signify, that they disapprove of the Declaration, when their reading it, though only in obedience to the King, signifies their approbation of it, as much as actions can signify a consent : let us call to mind how it fared with those in King Charles the First's Reign, who read the *Book of Sports*, as it was called, and then preached against it.

To return then to our Argument ; If reading the Declaration in our Churches be in the nature of the action, in the intention of the command, in the opinion of the People, an interpretative consent to it, I think my self bound in conscience not to read it, because I am bound in conscience not to approve it :

It is against the Constitution of the Church of *England*, which is established by Law, and to which I have subscribed, and therefore am bound in conscience to teach nothing contrary to it, while this Obligation lasts :

It is to teach an unlimited and universal Toleration, which the Parliament in 72. declared illegal, and which has been condemned by the Christian Church in all Ages :



It is to teach my People, that they need never come to Church more, but have my free leave, as they have the King's, to go to a Conventicle, or to Mass:

It is to teach the dispensing Power, which alters, what has been formerly thought, the whole Constitution of this Church and Kingdom: which we dare not do, till we have the Authority of Parliament for it:

It is to recommend to our People, the choice of such persons to sit in Parliament, as shall take away the *Test and Penal Laws*, which most of the Nobility and Gentry of the Nation have declared their judgment against:

It is to condemn all those great and worthy Patriots of their Country, who forfeited the dearest thing in the World to them, next a good Conscience, viz. The favour of their Prince, and a great many honourable and profitable Employments with it, rather than consent to that Proposal of taking away the *Test and Penal Laws*, which they apprehend destructive to the *Church of England* and the *Protestant Religion*; and he who can in conscience do all this, I think need scruple nothing.

For let us consider further, what the effects and consequences of our reading the Declaration are likely to be, and I think they are matter of Conscience too, when they are evident and apparent.

This will certainly render our Persons and Ministry infinitely contemptible, which is against that Apostolick Canon, *Let no man despise thee*, Titus 2. 15. That is, so to behave himself in his Ministerial Office, as not to fall under contempt; and therefore this obliges the Conscience, not to make our selves ridiculous, nor to render our Ministry, our Counsels, Exhortations, Preaching, Writing, of no effect, which is a thousand times worse than being silenced: Our Sufferings will Preach more effectually to the People, when we cannot Speak to them: but he who for Fear or Cowardize, or the Love of this World, betrays his Church and Religion by undue compliances, and will certainly be thought to do so, may continue to Preach, but to no purpose; and when we have rendered our selves ridiculous and contemptible, we shall then quickly fall, and fall unpitied.

There is nothing will so effectually tend to the final ruin of the *Church of England*, because our Reading the Declaration will discourage, or provoke, or misguide, all the Friends the *Church of England* has: can we blame any man for not preserving the Laws and the Religion of our Church and Nation, when we our selves will venture nothing for it? can we blame any man for consenting to Re-  
peal

peal the *Test and Penal Laws*, when we recommend it to them by reading the Declaration? have we not reason to expect that the Nobility and Gentry, who have already suffered in this Cause, when they hear themselves condemned for it in all the Churches of *England*, will think it time to mend such a fault, and reconcile themselves to their Prince? and if our Church fall this way, is there any reason to expect that it should ever rise again? Those Consequences are almost as evident as Demonstrations; and let it be what it will in it self, which I foresee will destroy the *Church of England* and the *Protestant Religion* and *Interest*, I think I ought to make as much conscience of doing it, as of doing the most immoral action in nature.

To say, that these mischievous consequences are not absolutely necessary, and therefore do not affect the Conscience, because we are not certain they will follow, is a very mean Objection; Moral Actions indeed have not such necessary consequences, as natural causes have necessary effects, because no moral causes act necessarily: reading the Declaration will not as necessarily destroy the Church of *England*, as fire burns Wood; but if the consequence be plain and evident; the most likely thing that can happen, if it be unreasonable to expect any other, if it be what is plainly intended and designed, either I must never have any regard to Moral Consequences of my Actions, or if ever they are to be considered, they are in this case.

Why are the Nobility and Gentry so extremely averse to the Repeal of the *Test and Penal Laws*? why do they forfeit the King's Favour, and their Honourable Stations, rather than comply with it? if you say that this tends to destroy the Church of *England* and the Protestant Religion, I ask whether this be the necessary consequence of it? whether the King cannot keep his promise to the Church of *England* if the *Test and Penal Laws* be Repealed? We cannot say, but this may be: and yet the Nation does not think fit to try it; and we commend those great men who deny it; and if the same question were put to us, we think we ought in Conscience to deny them ourselves: and are there not as high probabilities, that our Reading the Declaration will promote the Repeal of the *Test and Penal Laws*, as that such a Repeal will ruin our Constitution; and bring in Popery upon us? Is it not as probable, that such a Compliance in us will disoblige all the Nobility and Gentry, who have hitherto been true to us, as that when the power of the Nation is put into Popish Hands, by the Repeal of such *Tests and Laws*, the Priests and Jesuits may find some *salvo* for the King's Conscience, and persuade him to forget his promise to the Church of *England*? and if the probable ill con-

sequences of Repealing the Test and Penal Laws, be a good reason not to comply with it, I cannot see but that the as probable ill consequences of Reading the Declaration, is as good a reason not to read it.

The most material Objection is, that the Dissenters, whom we ought not to provoke, will expound our not Reading it, to be the effect of a Persecuting Spirit: Now I wonder men should lay any weight on this, who will not allow the most probable consequences of our Actions, to have any influence upon Conscience: for if we must compare consequences, to disoblige all the Nobility and Gentry by Reading it, is likely to be much more fatal, than to anger the Dissenters: and it is more likely, and there is much more reason for it, that one should be offended than the other: For the Dissenters who are Wise and considering, are sensible of the snare themselves, and though they desire Ease and Liberty, they are not willing to have it with such apparent hazard of Church and State: I am sure that tho' we were never so desirous that they might have their Liberty, (and when there is opportunity of shewing our inclinations without danger, they may find that we are not such Persecutors as we are represented) yet we cannot consent that they should have it this way, which they will find the dearest Liberty that ever was granted.

This Sir, is our Case in short, the Difficulties are great on both sides, and therefore now if ever, we ought to beseege Heaven with our Prayers, for Wisdom, and Counsel, and Courage; that God would protect his Church and Reformed Christianity, against all the devices of their Enemies: Which is the daily and hearty Prayer of,

SIR,

May 22. 1688.

Your Friend and Brother.

### POSTSCRIPT.

I Have just now seen H. Carels Paper called, The Public Occurrences, which came out to day, and cannot but set you right as to his News about the Reading of the Declaration on Sunday: He tells you, 'That several Divines of the Church of England, in and about this City, eminent for their Piety and Moderation, did yesterday Read his Majesty's late Declaration in their Churches, according to the Order in that behalf; but some (to the great surprize of their Parishioners) were pleased to decline it. You in the Country are from this Account to believe, that it was Read here by the generality of the Clergy, and by the eminent Men among them: but I can, and do assure you, that this is one of the most impudent Lyes that ever was printed: For as to this City which hath above a hundred Parishes in it, it was Read only in Four or Five Churches, all the rest, and best of the Clergy refusing to carry where: I will spare their Names who read it; but should I mention them, it would make you, who know this City, a little heartily to deride H.C.'s Account of them. And for the Surprize he talks of, the contrary of it is so true, that in Wood-street, where it was Read by our Dr. M. the People generally went out of the Church. This I tell you, that you may be provided for the future against such an impudent Lye, who, for Bread, can march and put about the Nation, the falsest of things.

I am Yours.



